

Creation and invention of national political culture in Bohemia

1848-1868

-Mediation between social and cultural history-

(Résumé)

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This thesis analyzes problems of building of Czech national society on the countryside in the time from the revolution of 1848 up to the consolidation of dual monarchy in 1868. We can distinguish building process of Czech society after the abolition of servitude in 1848 into three periods: a period from 1848/49 to 1870s, a period from 1870s to the turn of the centuries, and a period from the turn of the centuries to the age of the “total wars”. The first period this thesis deals with can be characterized by fundamental transformations of peasants’ society after the abolition of servitude and the gradual penetration of norms and life-styles of civil society. It was rather a loose network of the local honorables, such as a network of voluntary associations and communal autonomous bodies than a solid organization of any political party that enabled the mass mobilization of national movements. This thesis emphasizes that political mobilizations of national parties (national pilgrimages, national festivities a other various manifestations) were not realized by any political purposes nor by any more or less concrete social interests in a narrow sense of the word, but by fundamental transformations in social relations and way of cultural and social perception of peasantry.

From the point of political and power relations it is true that “the revolution of Intellectuals” was deliberately suppressed, but it created essential conditions for the development of civil society in the second half of the 19-century. Already during the revolution there emerged conflicts between upper strata of peasantry and poor population on the countryside as a serious political and social problem. Abolition of servitude and patrimonial administration and jurisdiction stimulated further changes in power structure on the countryside. While the neoabsolutism tried to introduce a unified state administration with district government as a lowest instance of state power, it left local administration (local police, administration of communal property etc.) to a newly introduced communal autonomy system, whose practices were but more subordinated to local and folk customs than to the legal norms. Although district governments reported repeatedly “apathy” and “illegal” behaviors of the leaders of communal autonomy, higher authority of state administration did not actively intervene to the communal matter, unless any political “conspiracy” concerned (of course such cases were very rare). This attitude of state administration reflected to a certain extent concept of social orders from the time of ancient regime. There were still many, even more than in the previous time cases of conflicts between upper strata of peasantry and the poor population on the countryside around communal property and its managements, but there were no legal and institutionalized bases for the solution, and state authority expressed almost no intention for the solution.

Since the abolition of servitude and patrimonial administration and jurisdiction upper strata of peasantry had built up hegemonic position in peasant society, and could make

use of their factual “rights” on communal property on the basis of older folk norms about the social order which but gradually lost the actual validity a legitimization in the eyes of the poor class. With the abolition of servitude former landlords got rid of all the obligation of social cares for the impoverished population, which meant a serious threat to the very life of the poor class. The abolition of servitude did not bring up a new social order, and transformation of power structure on the countryside did not create corresponding consciousness about the new social order.

Liberal concept of communal autonomy was represented by a credo, “foundation of a free is a free commune”, but the concept was never realized during the Neoabsolutism. The Neoabsolutism did not intend to create “citizens” from the former serfs, and peasants themselves were not interested in a “public life”, and institutionalization of communal autonomy.

It was not until the quasi-constitutional 1860s when new cultural form began to be invented, that enabled wider section of population to represent themselves in the public sphere to express their certain political consciousness, and that was invented as a national form. This new creation of national form of culture was an essential basis for the further development of communal autonomy and voluntary associations. With this cultural creation, the social transformation since the revolution of 1848/49 found a corresponding political expression. And vice versa: further development of communal autonomy and voluntary associations became to a social basis for the creation of national culture for the wider segments of population.

Sociability of peasant population transformed from a hidden sociability based on

local customs and tradition to a visible sociability that was embodied in institutionalized communal and district autonomy and voluntary associations. Local “Sokol”, choral associations, “banderium”(peasant cavalry), etc. provided representations that clearly and visibly represented local society in a national society. This process corresponded also to disintegration of local communities.

Social conflicts were now expressed and demonstrated in an institutionalized political battle, that is, for example in a form of local elections to communal and district autonomous body. Fighting parties could utilize national symbols and refer to national discourses so as to legitimize their position in a battle of local context. Important thing is that social conflicts in a local society could be formulated by the discourses and symbols of national politics. So the meaning of political and social conflicts inside the local society could be, and sometimes should be, interpreted in a context of national society. Each local conflict could have now inevitably the national dimension.

National culture marked the boundary of public life, and civil society itself was in historical reality realized as a national society. This contradictory process was most clearly reflected in a “time of festivity passion” of the 1860s and especially in a national movement for the building of the National Theater.

In conclusion this thesis analyses politicization of the society at the turn of 1860s and 1870s by an example of “Tábor“ movement. Tábor movement is often considered in history as the first culmination of Czech national politics. From the view point of organizational structure and semiotic construction it can be regarded as the direct application of practices and experiences of national festivities from the whole 1860s,

and at the same time, as the starting point of further developments of national political culture in Bohemia with its defined political characters.